a guide to ham slang

Barefo... Operating a low-power transmitter without any extra high-power amplifier. Amplifiers, therefore, can be called a "pair of socks," or a "pair of shoes." An amateur building his own amplifier might say he was "knitting a new pair of socks."

California kilowatt: A transmitter running in excess of the legal amateur power limit of 1000 watts.

Gallon: The legal maximum power of 1000 watts (kilowatt of kW). A "Novice gallon" would be 250 watts.

Jugs: Large high-power vacuum tubes, frequently used in pairs. A ham with a commanding signal might justifiably brag about having a "nice pair of jugs" in his amplifier.

Rockcrusher: A station which puts out an extraordinarily powerful-sounding signal, frequently due to a kilowatt and a big, efficient antenna.

Tin ear: Another telegrapher's malady, usually attributed to overwork or being hungover. Frequent errors in copying CW are attributed to having a "tin ear."

BY DOUGLAS STIVISON, WA1KWJ

With the CB boom, dictionaries and glossaries of CB terms are sprouting up everywhere — from printed paper placemats in highway greasy-spoon restaurants, to slick hard-covered books. The slang of radio amateurs, although much older than that of the CB, still seems a virtual foreign language to many short-wave listeners and beginning amateurs. While technical words, standard Morse-code abbreviations, and commonly used Q-signs are listed and explained in dozens of handbooks and pamphlets, the colorful amateur slang has seldom been committed to print.

For those of you who think that a twisted pair is a reference to Bonnie and Clyde, here is one ham's guide to hamese.

Armchair copy — effortless, perfect reception without noise, interference, or fading.

Barefoot — operating a low-power transmitter without any extra high-power amplifier. Amplifiers, therefore, can be called a "pair of socks," or a "pair of shoes." An amateur building his own amplifier might say he was "knitting a new pair of socks."

Big gun — any well-known operator who consistently puts out a commanding signal, works lots of DX, or is a frequent winner in ham contests.

Big switch — imaginary control which takes a station off the air. To "pull the big switch" is to turn the rig off in order to go to bed for the night. Some stations will actually have a master station-power switch as a safety precaution.

Bootleg — any illegal operation such as running too much power or operating without a license.

Brasspounder — a Morse-code enthusiast. Derived from the brass lever and parts used on early telegraph keys.

Bug — neither an insect nor a hidden listening device. It is a semi-automatic telegraph key which automatically forms the dots with a vibrating contact. Dashes are made manually.

Bunny hunt — an outdoor competition in which amateurs using direction-finding (DF) equipment track down a hidden transmitter ("bunny"). Also called "Fox Hunts." It is a particularly popular sport in Europe.

California kilowatt — a transmitter running in excess of the legal amateur power limit of 1000 watts.

Cans — headphones.

CW — Morse-code radio-

telegraphy. Originally derived from an abbreviation for continuous wave — a major improvement over more primitive ways to transmit Morse code.

DX — amateur radio stations in foreign countries or at a great distance. Thus a "DXer" or "DX hound" is one who enjoys working foreign stations. A "DXpedition" is a trip with the goal of putting a station on the air in a rare or hard-to-work foreign country.

Fist — a telegrapher's personal style and rhythm of sending. It can be as distinctive as one's handwriting or even one's voice.

Gallon — the legal maximum power of 1000 watts (kilowatt or kW). A "Novice gallon" would be 250 watts.

Glass arm — a pain and stiffness in the arm from long hours of sending CW. A CW man whose sending is choppy or full of errors is said to have a "glass arm."

Handle — one's name.

Harmonics — an amateur's children. Derived from a pun based on the technical word for signals which are generated by, and related to, other signals.

Hearing aid — a ham's receiver.

Hilltopping — taking a portable ham rig to some remote location in order to exploit the range-boosting effects of increased elevation. Hilltopping is popular on vhf for contests or DXpeditions.

Home brew — homebuilt, as in "I home brewed the rig." A variant is, "I rolled my own receiver."

Jugs — large high-power vacuum tubes, frequently used in pairs. A ham with a commanding signal might justifiably brag about having a "nice pair of jugs" in his amplifier.

Junkbox — a ham's supply of spare parts and homebrewing supplies. Frequently, a junkbox actually describes an amateur's basement and garage filled with old TV sets and war-surplus gear, all of which will come in handy "some day."

Kilowatt alley — the lower segments of the twenty-meter phone and CW bands, traditionally dominated by the big-guns, rockcrushers, and California kilowatts. Definitely an uncompetitive part of the amateur spectrum for the less-well-equipped fellow running 20 watts and a dipole.

Landline — the telephone. Also called the "twisted pair."

Lid — a discourteous or poor operator.

Lunchbox — any small, portable rig. A "Benton Harbor Lunchbox" was one very popular early Heathkit transceiver.

MARS — Not a planet, but the Military Affiliated Radio System of amateur traffic handlers using military frequencies adjacent to the ham bands.

Mill — typewriter. Most CW operators find it much more convenient to transcribe high-speed CW on a mill than to use a pencil and paper ("sticking it").

Old man (OM), Old boy (OB) — any male radio operator. *The Old Man* refers to Hiram Percy Maxim, amateur radio pioneer and founder of the ARRL.

OSCAR — *O*rbital *S*atellite *C*arrying *A*mateur *R*adio Any of the communications or beacon satellites built and operated by radio amateurs.

Peanut whistle — any very low-powered rig.

Phone patch — a device to connect an amateur radio station with the commercial telephone lines. When international telephone service is either unavailable or prohibitively expensive, phone-patching frequently becomes the only practical way for missionaries or overseas military personnel to contact their families back in America.

Pinning the meter — making a meter give a full-scale reading. Usually it refers to a signal which is so strong that the receiving station's S-meter can give no higher reading.

Reading the mail — listening to conversations taking place over the air without actually participating in them.

Rig — one's radio equipment. Whether it describes a one-tube home built set or a collection of a dozen fancy commercial units, a ham's radio is always called his "rig."

Rocks — crystals used to control one's transmitter frequency. To be "rockbound" does not refer to the scenic characteristic of the coast of Maine, but to an amateur's inability to change frequency due to a finite collection of crystals.

Rockcrusher — a station which puts out an extraordinarily powerful-sounding signal, frequently due to a kilowatt and a big, efficient antenna.

RTTY — (pronounced *ritty*) amateur radioteleprinter. *Teletype* is a registered trade name of the Teletype corporation.

Shack — the room housing a ham station, whether a king's palace, a ship at sea, a basement corner, or a tenement kitchen.

Sked — schedule.

Sideswiper — any semi- or fully automatic telegraph key using a sideways rather than an up-and-down movement.

Sky hook — a ham's antenna.

Straight key — the traditional up-and-down type of telegraph key.

Tin ear — another telegrapher's malady, usually attributed to overwork or being hungover. Frequent errors in copying CW are attributed to having a "tin ear."

Top band — the 160-meter ham band.

Traffic — messages carried via amateur radio, generally as a public service for non-amateurs. Handling messages

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is a popular facet of the hobby, attracting many dedicated amateurs who get together in traffic "nets" (short for networks).

TVI — television interference. Also called "Tennessee Valley Indians," or simply "Indians." Interfering with a neighbor's TV reception causes poor public relations for amateur radio and should be avoided if at all possible.

Wallpaper — the collection of certificates, awards, and QSL cards decorating a ham's shack.

Wouff-Hong — the ultimate amateur-radio torture instrument for those causing unnecessary interference. It was originally mentioned by *The Old Man* (Hiram Percy Maxim) in a facetious *QST* magazine editorial decrying rotten QRM (interference). Other fearsome amateur-radio torture instruments are the Rettysnitch and the Uggerumph.

XYL — an amateur's wife, derived from ex-young lady. "YF" is also an abbreviation for wife.

YL — a young lady or any woman radio amateur friend, or relative, regardless of age.

Zulu — Greenwich Mean Time, GMT, Co-ordinated Universal Time. The universally-understood time system used in all international amateur and scientific work to avoid confusion due to differing local times. Based on the zero meridian at Greenwich, England.

73 — best regards. The ham's traditional way of saying goodbye or ending a message. Note that 73 is *always* singular, never plural (73s).

807 — ubiquitous transmitting tube of World War II and immediately afterwards. Today it often means a bottle of beer, as in "After we got the antenna installed we knocked off a case of 807s."

88 — love and kisses.

HRH